



# Wisconsin Community Action Program Association

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## Testimony on SB 353

Senate Committee on Children and Families

Senator Judy Robson, Chair

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The Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP) represents Community Action Agencies that directly operate 50 food pantries and provide support to more than 160 others. Their efforts, heavily supported by volunteers, play a vital role in preventing hunger for thousands of Wisconsin citizens by delivering 3-4 million pounds of federal commodities a year, in addition to even greater amounts of food from the private sector.

Community Action Agencies and other organizations strongly support SB 353 because low-income households that depend on food pantries are truly in need - 70% earn less than \$10,000 a year, 39% are children, and one in three must choose between buying food and paying the rent or mortgage. Unfortunately, many food pantries are facing an increase in demand that is stressing their capacity to serve these families. Declines in cash assistance and food stamps have far outstripped declines in the state poverty rate, contributing to this trend. From January 1996 to July 1999 food stamp enrollments declined 40% in Wisconsin - the highest in the nation. But according to the Census Bureau the number of people living in poverty in Wisconsin dropped by only 1.3% (from 95/96 to 97/98). For comparison's sake the food stamp program brought \$210 million in benefits to low-income citizens in 1995, but only \$126 million by 1998.

Because families are still in need but receiving fewer federal resources, they turn to emergency food providers to help fill the gap. Many pantries have subsequently reported significant increases in pantry usage. For instance the Racine/Kenosha Community Action Agency reported a 37% increase from 1997 to 1999. *WISCAP's analysis of data from 149 food pantries in 55 counties found a 24% increase in demand in 1997 alone. A pantry survey published by Miller Brewing the same year reported that 62% of hunger relief providers felt hunger had increased in their local area in the past 5 years.*

Unfortunately food pantries often lack sufficient financial resources, equipment, food, and/or volunteers. This in turn can force pantries to reduce food or access, translating into increased hunger. Recent surveys in Dane, Waukesha, and Brown Counties found that half of adults (45% to 58%) using pantries and other food programs still had to skip meals or reduce meal portions because they did not have enough money for food. Many reported their children had to take these steps.

In a state as prosperous as Wisconsin it is unacceptable that some families experience hunger or uncertainty about getting enough to eat. Food pantries need state funds to help them meet the challenges they now face as we work toward solutions that go beyond emergency food.

*SB 353 will enhance the capacity of food pantries to leverage greater support from the private sector* by enabling pantries to purchase needed equipment to handle additional private donations, especially perishable food. It will assist with transportation, storage and food processing to help pantries maximize food resources, will help cover administrative costs of coordinating food drives, expanding hours, or finding volunteers.

Though pantries are working to address hunger, resources are limited, especially in rural areas. The rural set-aside will help pantries in outlying areas to better meet the challenges they face. For example, the Sauk Prairie Food Pantry that has seen a 50% increase in demand in the last year, or the Indianhead Food Pantry in Burnett County that has difficulty obtaining sufficient local food donations, or food pantries in the 9 counties served by NEWCAP in northeastern Wisconsin that have experienced substantial increases in demand.

At the USDA's national summit on hunger Secretary Glickman called on state and local governments, community organizations, and businesses to forge a true partnership with national efforts to cut the incidence of hunger in half by 2015. We ask you to join us in reducing hunger in Wisconsin by passing SB 353. For more information please contact Jonathan Bader, Food Security Coordinator, 608-244-9320.

**The following is a partial list of organizations that support SB 353**

Kraft Foods, Inc.  
Southwestern Community Action Agency (*Dodgeville*)  
Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin (*Madison*)  
Western Dairyland (*Independence*)  
Central Wisconsin Community Action Council (*Lake Delton*)  
Racine/Kenosha Community Action Agency (*Kenosha*)  
NEWCAP (*Oconto*)  
West CAP (*Glenwood City*)  
Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee  
Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin  
Midwest Anti-Hunger Network  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Southern Wisconsin  
Second Harvest Food Bank of Wisconsin  
SHARE of Wisconsin  
Hunger Prevention Council of Dane County  
Wisconsin Catholic Conference  
Wisconsin Community Action Program Association  
Wisconsin Council of Churches  
Wisconsin Council on Children and Families

Wisconsin Immigrant & Refugee Coalition  
Wisconsin Interfaith IMPACT  
Wisconsin Jewish Conference  
Shalom Center of the Interfaith Network (*Kenosha*)  
First Congregational Church (*Hillsboro*)  
Portage Food Pantry (*Portage*)  
Love, Inc. (*Burlington*)  
Chippewa Falls Food Pantry (*Chippewa Falls*)  
Kennedy Heights Community Center (*Madison*)  
Necedah Food Pantry (*Necedah*)  
Marquette County Food Bank (*Montello*)  
Care and Share Food Bank  
Open Cupboard (*Osceola*)  
Resurrection Lutheran Church Food Pantry (*Green Bay*)  
Federated Church of Green Lake (*Green Lake*)  
St Peter Claver Church Food Pantry (*Sheboygan*)  
Birnamwood Area Community Cupboard (*Birnamwood*)  
Bloomer Community Food Pantry (*Bloomer*)  
Community Industries Corporation (*Stevens Point*)  
Dane County Food Pantry Network  
Racine County Food Bank